

Policy Helps Public Health Employees Find Healthier Food at Work

Issue

Every day, employees at the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) make choices about meals and snacks at work – food that they bring from home, buy in a cantAlong with physical inactivity, poor diet is a major contributing factor to disabilities that result from diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity and stroke. The statistics are staggering:

- South Carolina experienced \$1.1 billion in obesity-attributable medical expenditures in 2003
- Chronic diseases account for seven out of every 10 deaths in the United States and for more than 60 percent of total medical care expenditures
- Over 61 percent of SC adults are overweight or obese
- Only 22 percent of South Carolinians eat the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables each day
- About 75 percent of Americans eat too little fruit, 95 percent eat too few vegetables, and 64 percent eat too much saturated fat, according to the report *Healthy People 2010*
- Over 58 percent of South Carolinians are employed. Worksites, where adults spend half or more of their waking hours, have a significant impact on individuals' health

Intervention

In 2004, the DHEC Division of Cardiovascular Health began to develop a worksite wellness initiative, CAPITAL HEALTH, to evaluate prevention strategies and programs for cardiovascular disease risk factors. CAPITAL HEALTH is a one-year pilot that will be the foundation for building a comprehensive worksite wellness program that could serve as a model program to other government agencies or private worksites in South Carolina. This initiative provided an opportunity to review the agency's current health promotion policy. Since there was no existing policy for healthy food at work, steps were taken to develop the new policy:

- Research conducted on similar policies in other states
- Nutrition criteria determined and draft policy prepared
- Work group formed to review and refine draft policy
- Implementation/monitoring issues identified
- Consultation received from Health Services medical and nutrition directors
- Policy presented to agency's Administrative Policy Issues Committee and approved

Without Block Grant funding for staff, this new health promotion policy would not have been possible.

Impact

To support and encourage its employees' efforts to prevent disease and attain optimum health, the state's public health agency recently approved a policy on *Healthy Food Choices at Work*.

The new policy gives guidance and resources for employees, including:

- Guidelines for vending/canteen foods and beverages – “50 percent of all offerings should contain less than 15 percent Daily Value for saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium.”
- Guidelines for catered and non-catered meetings and special events – “fruit, vegetable, vegetarian and whole-grain food selections.”
- On-line web links (in development) and point-of-service resources:
 - Snack Wise – Making Healthier Vending Machine Choices
 - Healthy Vending – Recommended Beverages and Snacks
 - Guidelines for Offering Healthy Foods at Meetings, Seminars and Catered Events

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